

Today, in the House of Representatives, we will cast one of the most important votes of this new Congress when we vote to override President Bush's veto of the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP.

In our vote to expand SCHIP last month, we made a genuine dent in one of the most shameful inadequacies of our health care system: the lack of coverage for many of America's children.

Congress created the State Child Health Insurance Program in 1997 with broad bipartisan support, and as a result, over six million children currently have health care coverage that otherwise would not. In New York, nearly 400,000 children are enrolled - the second highest in the nation.

This SCHIP reauthorization bill would preserve access to health care for 6 million children already enrolled in the program, while bringing desperately needed health coverage to almost 4 million children. And here in New York State, an additional 268,000 children will have health care coverage.

This program has the support of a vast majority of State Governors, both Republicans and Democrats, and is extremely popular with the American people. Yet, despite this overwhelming support from all sides, the President decided to use his dusty veto pen, and with it deny millions of children access to health care.

The President chastises the \$35 billion bill – which is fully paid for – as “too expensive.” And with the same breath, he seeks an additional \$190 billion for the Iraq War – all of which is at the expense of the taxpayer. This is simply unconscionable when you realize that the amount of money it takes to provide health coverage to 10 million children for an entire year is what we spend in Iraq in just 40 days.

We must get our priorities straight, and that is exactly what this override vote is about today. Should his veto stand, the vital health care for the six million children already covered will be yanked away on November 16th.

The American people expect us to tackle the health care challenge before us. They demand it. I will support overriding this veto so the SCHIP expansion becomes law. The lives of literally millions of American children depend on it.